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PERCEIVED ROLE AND TASK CHARACTERISTIC INFLUENCES ON
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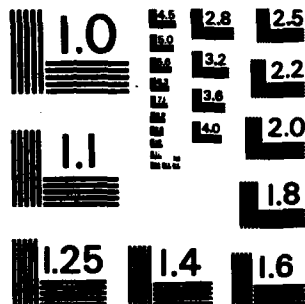
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Perceived Role and Task Characteristic Influences on
Satisfaction, Commitment, and Turnover Decision-Making in
Three Health Care Occupations

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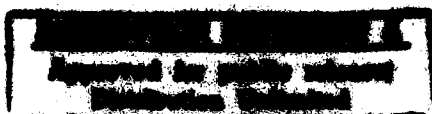
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In recent years, considerable evidence has accumulated regarding the influence of role stress, role orientation, perceived task characteristics, and other background variables in explaining variation in such outcomes as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and organizational withdrawal (Bedeian & Armenakis, 1981; Hrebiniak & Alluto, 1972; Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979; Steers, 1977). Although much of the interest in satisfaction and commitment has focused on identifying their job-related and individual (i.e., demographic) correlates, no clear consensus has emerged regarding whether such correlates are equally important to the development of each construct and, ultimately, to turnover decision-making. Given repeated demonstrations of the importance of job satisfaction and organizational commitment in understanding the work behavior of individuals in different settings, as well as recently voiced concerns over the competing value of these constructs in explaining the turnover process (Hom & Hulin, 1981), the present study examined interrelationships among a number of personal, role, and perceived task characteristic measures and determined their combined influence on satisfaction, commitment, and turnover decision-making.

To amplify briefly, the literature on role stress (i.e., role conflict and role ambiguity) provides inconsistent and sometimes conflicting results concerning job satisfaction. On one hand, Kahn, et al. (1964) suggested that the organizational environment can and does affect individual expectations regarding normative role behavior. Their theory asserts that role conflict results when the behaviors required of an individual from one segment of the organization are inconsistent with behavioral requirements emanating from other organizational sources. In contrast, role ambiguity is said to result from a lack of clarity associated with specific job requirements. As an individual experiences greater role stress (from either source), dissatisfaction and performance decrements were hypothesized. Numerous investigations have supported these general notions, thus indicating the dual importance of both components of role stress in understanding job satisfaction (cf. Bedeian & Armenakis, 1981; Kahn, et al., 1964; Tosi, 1971).

Alternatively, several investigators hypothesized differential effects of conflict and ambiguity is more conceptually allied with the job itself (or perceived job characteristics), while role conflict is linked to the quality of interpersonal relationships in the work environment. House and Rizzo (1972), for example, reported that role ambiguity was uniquely related to measures of job satisfaction and organizational effectiveness with role conflict more strongly associated with supportive leadership style and a number of organizational practices (e.g., formalization of rules and procedures, adherence to the chain of command, etc.). Similarly, Miles (1976) found substantial differences in the ability of role ambiguity versus role conflict to explain variation in job satisfaction and perceived performance effectiveness, but no difference between conflict and ambiguity regarding prediction of a general measure of job-related tension and anxiety. Findings such as these suggest that questions remain concerning relationships between individually experienced role stress and a number of organizationally relevant outcomes.

In a related vein, Organ and Greene (1981) reported the results of a study which included a measure of organizational identification, a concept more closely related to organizational commitment than job satisfaction. Consistent with the findings of House and Rizzo (1972) and Miles (1976), Organ and Greene determined that role conflict and role ambiguity were differentially related to organizational identification among a sample of scientists and engineers employed in

three separate, increasingly bureaucratic, settings. Specifically, under conditions of higher formalization of organizational procedures (i.e., increased bureaucracy), role ambiguity levels tended to decline but at the expense of generating higher levels of role conflict. This pattern of results suggests that the role conflict component of role stress acts primarily on concepts related to organizational commitment while role ambiguity is more strongly related to task characteristics and job satisfaction which in turn influence organizational commitment.

Beyond the effects of role stress on organizationally relevant outcomes such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment just described, it is also likely that individuals are differentially affected by organizational demands and perceived task characteristics as a function of their individual role orientation or role preferences. Based on the earlier work of Miller and Wager (1971), Butler, Bruder, and Jones (1981) described two predominant role orientations that professional employees in organizational settings may assume, one referred to as "bureaucratic" (i.e., general administrative) and the other as "professional" (i.e., emphasizing one's occupational specialty). The first is characterized by an interest in, or orientation toward, the functioning of organizations per se, while the second reflects a greater emphasis on the technical, substantive, or normative issues of one's professional specialty. It is logical to expect that as role orientation measures are incorporated into models of role stress-organizational demand relationships, enhanced understanding of processes leading to such organizationally relevant outcomes as satisfaction, commitment, and turnover would result. Specifically, the extent to which organizational demands are perceived as inconsistent with a particular role orientation should increase the level of experienced role stress within the person and correspondingly, the likelihood of negative outcomes. In short, if those who exercise significant control in the organization favor the goals, values, procedures, and structures of those possessing a bureaucratic role outlook, then professionally role-oriented individuals would likely experience increased role conflict versus role ambiguity. Because of this, the subsequent clashes which might ensue between employee values and perceived organizational demands should result in substantially more negative influence on variables such as organizational commitment and turnover decision-making as opposed to job satisfaction.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the present study investigated the differential effects on satisfaction, commitment, and turnover decision-making attributable to a combination of personal, role, and perceived task characteristic measures in a large, multi-occupation sample of health care professionals. Four specific hypotheses were advanced. First, professionally role oriented individuals were expected to report higher levels of role stress (i.e., role conflict and role ambiguity) and lower levels of both organizational commitment and intention to remain a member of the referent organization than bureaucratically oriented counterparts, regardless of occupational specialty. In terms of task characteristics or job satisfaction, however, no differences between role orientation groups were anticipated, based on evidence suggesting the increased sensitivity of the role orientation construct to variation in commitment and turnover as opposed to the conduct or nature of work itself.

Second, it was hypothesized that a combination of perceived task characteristic and role ambiguity measures would be more strongly related to job satisfaction than organizational commitment. Third, a combination of personal characteristics (i.e., demographic variables which

collectively determine one's role preference), role orientation, and role conflict measures were expected to be more strongly related to organizational commitment than job satisfaction. Finally, and based on the extensive literature relating job satisfaction and organizational commitment to turnover decision-making (cf. Mobley, Griffeth, Hand, & Meglino, 1979; Steers, 1977), it was hypothesized that anticipated retention decisions among organizational members would be directly related to job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and only indirectly influenced by role stress, role orientation, perceived task characteristics, or background variables.

Method

Sample. Survey data were obtained from 1,386 Navy Medical Service Corps (MSC) officers by means of a mailout questionnaire. The Navy MSC is comprised of more than 20 different health service administration, science, and clinical professions, and represents the most heterogeneous naval officer community both in terms of the professional mix and educational background of its members. The survey respondents represented 79% of the MSC community, from which a subset of 739 officers was selected who reported subscribing to either a professional ($n = 376$) or bureaucratic ($n = 363$) role orientation. This particular subset was selected to allow direct comparison, as stated earlier, of bureaucratic versus professionally role oriented individuals. Comparison of this group with the remainder of the sample revealed no differences in terms of rank, age, sex, education, or tenure. A more detailed description of the sample exists elsewhere (Bruder & Butler, 1981).

Measures. Background measures included single item assessments of rank, age, education, length of commissioned service, and organizational level which were combined to form an overall personal characteristics composite ($\alpha = .727$). Perceived task characteristics were determined using the short form of the Job Diagnostic Survey (Hackman & Oldham, 1975, 1976). Responses to each of the 15 items were summed to provide a measure of the overall quality, or scope, of the job itself; higher job scope scores are thus associated with more favorable job characteristic perceptions. Coefficient alpha for the combined items was .802.

Role stress (i.e., role conflict and role ambiguity) was measured using 9- and 8-item scales similar to those developed by Rizzo, House, and Lirtzman (1970) and Khan, et al. (1964). Examples of role conflict items include, "I do things that are likely to be accepted by one person and not by others." and, "To what extent do rules and regulations get in the way of doing your job in a timely manner?" ($\alpha = .778$). Role ambiguity item examples include, "I do not know what tasks I will be assigned from one day to the next." and, "It is often not clear who has the authority to make a decision regarding my job." ($\alpha = .785$). Responses to items in each scale summed so that higher total scores reflected higher levels of perceived conflict and ambiguity, respectively.

The bureaucratic and professional role orientation measures were described in detail earlier (Butler, et al., 1981). Briefly, bureaucratic role orientation was defined by a three-item scale assessing a person's interest in assuming general administrative and managerial positions of increasing responsibility. In contrast, professional role orientation was determined by three items which referred to a person's interest in being recognized by other specialists in one's occupational field, as well as by advancing and contributing to that

professional specialty regardless of the value of such contributions to one's status in the organization. Because these measures were essentially uncorrelated ($r = -.09$), they were combined to form an overall role orientation composite ($\alpha = .861$) for use in this study. Specifically, a professional versus bureaucratic role dichotomy was created; higher role orientation scores are associated with a more "professional" role outlook.

The seven-item organizational commitment measure ($\alpha = .848$) was based on the scale developed by Porter and his colleagues (Porter, Crampon, & Smith, 1976; Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974). Additional variables included a single item assessment of intent to remain a member of the organization, and a three-item measure of general, or overall, job satisfaction ($\alpha = .815$). Consistent with the scoring of the perceived task characteristic, role orientation, and role stress measures, the organizational commitment, turnover intention, and job satisfaction composites were evaluated so that higher scores would indicate a higher level of the particular attribute.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 contains descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among the major variables of interest. In general, the relationships shown were consistent with both our current expectations and the results of previous research. The personal characteristics composite, for example, correlated negatively with both role measures and positively with task and job-related outcomes. Such relationships portray the predominant influences of age, rank, and length of service in a logical manner; younger, less experienced individuals typically experienced higher levels of role stress (i.e., the sum of role conflict and role ambiguity scores) and tended to adopt, or bring to the work situation, a more professional role outlook. In contrast, older, more experienced workers perceived their jobs more favorably, were more satisfied with their work in general, and were more committed to the organization as a whole. In terms of role stress, and again consistent with the general results of prior studies, negative relationships were seen concerning perceived task characteristics, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and turnover intention. Collectively, these results indicate that higher levels of role stress are indeed associated with less favorable levels of task and job-related outcomes. In addition, and ignoring occupational specialty effects, individuals who maintained a predominantly professional role outlook tended to experience higher levels of role stress in their work environments.

A closer examination of the results shown in Table 1 revealed two additional findings more directly related to the overall objectives of the study. First, the relationship between personal characteristics and role orientation ($r = -.26$) was significantly greater than corresponding relationships between personal characteristics and either perceived task characteristics ($r = .13$, $t_{95} = -7.95$, $p < .001$) or job satisfaction ($r = .10$, $t_{95} = -6.91$, $p < .001$). Such differences reinforced the contention that personal characteristics, in general, contribute directly to defining one's role preference as opposed to contributing to the development of work environment perceptions. Second, and of somewhat greater importance, the fact that role orientation correlated significantly with organizational commitment ($r = -.44$, $p < .01$), while essentially unrelated to both job scope and job satisfaction ($r = .03$ and $-.08$, respectively) provided support for the hypothesis that role orientation would be uniquely related to one's attitude toward the organization as a whole rather than to more specific job or task characteristics. These points are examined in greater detail below.

Table 1

Correlations Among Personal, Role, Job, and Outcome Measures
For all Professionally or Bureaucratically Role Oriented
Respondents (N = 739)

Measures	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	S.D.
A. Personal Characteristics	1.00							110.06	80.75
B. Role Stress ^a	-.16**	1.00						41.30	9.25
C. Role Orientation	-.16**	.11**	1.00					1.51	.50
D. Job Scope	.13**	-.40**	.03	1.00				84.19	13.92
E. Overall Job Satisfaction	.10**	-.40**	-.08**	.37**	1.00			15.99	4.25
F. Organizational Commitment	.23**	-.33**	-.44**	.17**	.36**	1.00		23.97	5.25
G. Turnover Intention	.04*	-.30**	-.16**	.20**	.44**	.50**	1.00	3.94	1.31

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

NOTE: This measure consists of the combination of role conflict and role ambiguity

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations, and F-Tests for Job,
Role Stress, and Outcome Measures by Role
Orientation for Each Occupational Group

Measures	Role Orientation				F ^a
	Bureaucratic		Professional		
	M	SD	M	SD	
I. Health Care Administrators (N = 313)					
	(n = 276)		(n = 43)		
A. Job Scope	84.37	14.56	84.19	12.17	<1.00
F. Role Stress	40.44	9.47	44.35	9.61	6.30*
C. Overall Job Satisfaction	16.31	4.53	15.37	5.02	1.55
D. Organizational Commitment	26.31	4.28	22.07	4.53	35.77**
E. Turnover Intention	4.30	1.27	3.67	1.45	8.77**
II. Health Science and Technology Specialists (N = 174)					
	(n = 66)		(n = 108)		
A. Job Scope	85.82	15.23	84.37	14.47	<1.00
F. Role Stress	38.83	9.81	43.11	9.16	6.63*
C. Overall Job Satisfaction	16.38	4.60	15.73	5.00	<1.00
D. Organizational Commitment	26.23	4.71	22.84	4.93	15.93**
E. Turnover Intention	4.36	1.05	3.88	1.27	4.30*
III. Clinical Care Providers (N = 248)					
	(n = 92)		(n = 156)		
A. Job Scope	80.36	13.76	85.00	12.70	5.59*
F. Role Stress	40.84	8.68	41.37	8.71	<1.00
C. Overall Job Satisfaction	16.37	3.93	15.64	4.64	2.11
D. Organizational Commitment	26.39	5.04	20.88	4.89	47.53**
E. Turnover Intention	4.50	1.33	3.71	1.30	7.89**

^a Degrees of Freedom = (IHA: 1, 311); (HST: 1, 174); (CCP: 1, 244); one record was dropped in this analysis for missing occupational group information.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

In order to determine occupational differences in role orientation by job, role stress, commitment, and turnover intention, the sample was divided into three discrete groups according to the procedure described in an earlier report (Bruder, Butler, & Knox, 1981). These groups consisted of (a) health care administrators ($n = 313$), (b) health science and technology specialists (e.g., entomologists, microbiologists, aerospace physiologists; $n = 176$), and (c) clinical care providers (e.g., optometrists, clinical psychologists, physical therapists; $n = 248$). The results of the role orientation-outcome measure comparisons for each occupational group are shown in Table 2.

Among health care administrators and health science and technology specialists (Parts I and II of Table 2), the results were as hypothesized. Specifically, significant bureaucratic versus professional role orientation differences were seen regarding levels of experienced role stress, organizational commitment, and turnover intention, such that professionally role-oriented individuals of either occupational group indicated higher levels of stress, less commitment to the organization, and possessed a less favorable retention posture. No within occupational cluster differences were found for these groups concerning role orientation and either job scope or job satisfaction comparisons, results which further strengthen the link between role orientation and organizational level outcomes rather than specific aspects of work itself.

In reviewing results for clinical care providers (Part III of Table 2), the findings were somewhat mixed. On one hand, significant between role orientation group differences for these individuals were seen for both organizational commitment and turnover intention, while no difference was found for overall job satisfaction. As was the case among health care administrators and science and technology specialists, professionally role-oriented clinical care providers reported lower levels of commitment to the organization and indicated higher levels of turnover intention, despite being as satisfied with their jobs as their more bureaucratically oriented co-workers.

In terms of job scope and role stress, role orientation group differences were exactly opposite of what was hypothesized; within the clinical care occupational cluster, professionally role oriented workers perceived their jobs as significantly more enriched ($p < .05$) than bureaucratically oriented care providers, while also indicating no between group differences in level of experienced role stress. Such findings might be interpreted to mean that at the point of organizational entry, a period strongly associated with a predominantly professional role outlook, the nature of the work performed by the clinical care provider is more congruent with a combination of personal expectations, level of professional training, and organizational demands. Thus, perceived job and task characteristic descriptions are reported in a generally favorable light. Similarly, and probably resulting from this improved person-environment "fit," hypothesized role stress differences would quite logically be minimized. Of course, the validity of this interpretation remains a question for future research.

Results pertaining to the second and third hypotheses are summarized in Table 3. It is important to note that for the remaining analyses, the role stress measure was decomposed into its component parts, thus allowing the opportunity to examine differential role conflict and role ambiguity effects on job satisfaction and organizational commitment as described earlier. In terms of job satisfaction (Part I of Table 3), and as hypothesized, job scope was strongly related to the job satisfaction criterion ($p < .01$) while personal characteristics were not. Contrary to expectations, however, both

role conflict and role orientation added significantly to the prediction of job satisfaction ($p < .01$ for both predictors), while role ambiguity did not. For organizational commitment, the stepwise regression results were more consistent with the hypotheses. As shown in Part II of Table 3, a combination of role orientation, role stress, and personal characteristics measures contributed significantly ($p < .01$) to the prediction of commitment. In terms of role stress, both the conflict and ambiguity measures entered significantly, although the majority of the role stress variance related to commitment was attributed to role conflict.

Table 3
Results of Stepwise Multiple Regressions for Job
Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment

I. Job Satisfaction				
Variable Entered	Simple R	Multiple R	Beta	t
A. Job Scope	.57	.57	.47	13.92**
B. Role Conflict	-.42	.68	-.22	-4.29**
C. Role Orientation	-.08	.63	-.09	-2.86**
D. Role Ambiguity	-.44	.63	-.05	-1.37
E. Personal Characteristics	.10	.63	-.02	-.60
II. Organizational Commitment				
Variable Entered	Simple R	Multiple R	Beta	t
A. Role Orientation	-.44	.44	-.40	-11.98**
B. Role Conflict	-.27	.51	-.17	-4.23**
C. Role Ambiguity	-.32	.52	-.10	-2.30**
D. Personal Characteristics	.25	.53	.08	2.51**
E. Job Scope	.17	.53	.06	1.69

Step 1: $p < .01$; $p = .759$

Finally, hierarchical regression procedures were used to examine the effects of the personal, task, and role measures in combination with job satisfaction and organizational commitment to explain variability in turnover intention (Hypothesis 4). The results of this analysis (not tabled) indicate that, as hypothesized, organizational commitment and overall job satisfaction were strongly related to the level of one's intent to remain a member of the organization ($R^2 = .328$, $p < .001$). When the remaining role, task, and personal characteristic measures were included in the regression equation, none were individually significant, but in the aggregate combined to produce a marginally significant change in variance accounted for on the turnover intention criterion ($\Delta R^2 = .01$, $F(2, 731) = 5.00$, $p < .05$). From a practical standpoint, however, such a small increment lacks interpretive meaning, especially in light of the nonsignificant partial correlations associated with these latter predictors. It thus appears safe to conclude that turnover intentions are directly influenced by job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and only indirectly by role stress, role orientation, job scope, or background variables.

As a final check to the validity of this conclusion, a supplemental hierarchical regression analysis was run. In this analysis, turnover intentions were first regressed against the personal characteristics measures, with subsequent additions of both organizational commitment and job satisfaction. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 4. The purpose of this analysis was to control for the possible confounding of personal characteristics (personality, age, tenure, and education) with the other variables in the model.

on the commitment/job satisfaction--turnover intention relationship. Results indicated that organizational commitment and job satisfaction significantly increased the variance explained in turnover intention ($\Delta R^2 = .267$, $F [1, 735] = 134.00$, $p < .001$), beyond the effects attributable to personal characteristics alone. The subsequent addition of the remaining role and task measures to this equation yielded a nonsignificant increment in explained turnover intention variance ($\Delta R^2 = .007$, $F [3, 732] = 2.00$, $p < .20$).

Summary and Conclusions

In general, the foregoing results supported a number of the specific hypotheses. First, professionally role-oriented individuals, regardless of occupational specialty, tended to be less favorably oriented toward the organization as a whole, reflected both in measures of organizational commitment and intention to remain. Second, professionally role-oriented individuals appeared to experience higher levels of role stress than bureaucratic counterparts, although such effects were much less pronounced among clinical care providers. Finally, the results supported the suggestion that personal characteristics, role orientation, and the role conflict component of role stress were significant, antecedent correlates of organizational commitment, and only indirectly related to turnover decision-making. That is to say, whatever effects personal and role-related variables might have regarding turnover intentions are best seen in an aggregate sense as contributing to the development of one's level of commitment to the organization which, in turn, is more predictive of turnover intention.

The results were less clear concerning job satisfaction where, in addition to job scope, both role conflict and role orientation explained significant amounts of the variability in the satisfaction measure. Although role ambiguity was expected to exert greater influence on job satisfaction than would role conflict, the failure to support this hypothesis may be due to one of two reasons. First, Pearce (1981) recently noted that an unacceptable degree of redundancy may exist between role ambiguity and job dissatisfaction which, if true, could conceivably mask, or suppress, any hypothesized relationships between the two constructs. According to Pearce the concept of role ambiguity consists of two central components, referred to as "unpredictability" and "information deficiency." As typically operationalized, however, "role ambiguity has come to be measured almost exclusively as its information deficiency component" (p. 669). Because job dissatisfaction has sometimes been viewed as discrepancies from an ideal, Pearce concluded that "the variables of role ambiguity and job dissatisfaction are embarrassingly similar" (p. 669). The extent to which Pearce's redundancy argument is applicable in the current study would lead one to suspect a significantly stronger correlation between role ambiguity and job satisfaction than between role conflict and job satisfaction. When tested, however, no such difference was found ($r = -.44$ and $-.44$ for ambiguity and conflict, respectively; $t_{\alpha} = .616$, $p > .05$).

Second, failure to support the role ambiguity--job satisfaction relationship may be due, in part, to the relatively high correlation (i.e., .59) between the conflict and ambiguity measures, a fact which suggests either the inability among respondents to distinguish between the two concepts or an inability to measure them effectively. Tracy and Johnson (1981) reported that traditional measures of conflict and ambiguity are somewhat confounded by a combination of semantic and attributional problems which could conceivably inflate the between scale correlation, restricting their usefulness. As they indicated, for example, it is difficult to know for certain whether

the locus of role stress is best viewed as an intrapersonal phenomenon (i.e., role conflict) or as an inherent feature of the perceived work environment (e.g., role ambiguity). Additionally, the reluctance of researchers to resolve this question has perpetuated the use of measures contaminated by attribution of the source of role stress to self or others. Such insights, in combination with the results of this study, suggest that subsequent investigations requiring a distinction between role stress components would benefit from attempts to reduce composite overlap at the measurement level. Despite such difficulties, however, it is important to realize that role conflict and role ambiguity are important correlates of both job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and the current data suggest that each is necessary to provide more complete understanding of the turnover decision-making process.

Finally, the presence of role orientation as a significant predictor of job satisfaction was also not anticipated (cf. Part I of Table 3). It should be noted, however, that the increase in variability on job satisfaction accounted for by role orientation was less than one percent, and stands in marked contrast to its corresponding relationship with organizational commitment; in this latter instance, role orientation accounted for nearly 20% of the variability in the commitment measure. With the specific exception of clinical care providers, it thus appears that job satisfaction and task characteristic perceptions are relatively immune to variations in individual role orientation, and that health care professionals in general distinguish with some ease features of their immediate work environment as separate from characteristics of the employing organization as a whole. Although the effects of role orientation did not emerge as clearly as hypothesized, the magnitude of the differences just noted argue favorably for continued study of individual role/organizational compatibility as a determinant of favorable retention decisions via organizational commitment as opposed to job satisfaction.

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were related to organizational commitment and turnover decision-making. Implications for the use of individual role/organizational compatability concepts as determinants of organizational commitment and retention are discussed.

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